

**EXPLORING THE PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER AND THE APPLICABILITY OF
THIS POSITION FOR THE MORRIS TOWNSHIP FIRE DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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**An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy
as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program**

January 1999

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to explore the position of Public Information Officer (PIO) and evaluate if any ideas are applicable to the Morris Township Fire Department. The problem was how to increase the visibility of the fire service in the eyes of the public and administration of Morris Township.

An evaluative research project was conducted to explore: a.) The literature for jobs and duties of a PIO, b.) What is being done both across the United States and in New Jersey regarding PIO's, c.) Whether fire departments are utilizing PIO's, d.) Whether Morris Township Fire Department can utilize and institute a PIO position?

Research questions answered include the following:

1. What is a PIO?
2. What impact can a PIO have on the fire service?
3. Are fire departments utilizing PIO's?
4. What training is available for PIO's?
5. Can Morris Township utilize and institute a PIO position?

The principle research procedures used were surveys of two populations. A review of literature was conducted to explore Public Information Officers, their duties and current applications in the fire service. The survey results were tabulated and analyzed. Comments became useful data.

The results of the studies revealed a.) the PIO is definitely something all fire departments should be involved with, b.) a few fire departments in the United States and New Jersey are using some type of PIO, c.) the PIO could definitely help justify the benefits of budget expenditures and increase community awareness of the fire service and its

programs d.) not much is found in the literature or through surveys about the training of PIO's.

This project revealed the validity of a PIO for the fire service as well as its applicability for the Morris Township Fire Department.

Recommendations were made to share this research with the current administration and fire department membership. It was recommended that a media guide be developed as well as a media Incident Report sheet, with the accompanied training for all of the fire membership. Sharing this research project with the Black Meadows Mutual Aid Association and the NJ Career Fire Chief Associations are recommendations as well. Additional recommendations are found at the conclusion of this project.

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INTRODUCTION

The Morris Township Fire Department is a combination department made-up of two career officers, 17 volunteer officers, 16 career firefighters and 60 volunteer firefighters. The fire department is at present, fully supported by the taxpayers of Morris Township. The local elected officials are ever vigilant to hold the line on spending.

Prior attempts at positive press have met with mixed results. It became clear that some coordinated effort toward positive media exposure was warranted. For this research project, the Public Information Officer will be abbreviated as PIO. The purpose of this research project was to explore the position of Public Information Officer and evaluate if any ideas are applicable to the Morris Township Fire Department. The problem was how to increase the visibility of the fire service in the eyes of the community and administration of Morris Township.

An evaluative research project was conducted to explore: a.) The literature for job and duties of a PIO's b.) What is being done both across the United States and in New Jersey regarding PIO's, c.) Whether fire departments are utilizing PIO's, d.) Whether Morris Township Fire Department can utilize and institute a PIO position?

Considering this information, PIO concepts can be evaluated. Recommendations for the use of these concepts were dictated by results.

Research questions include the following:

1. What is a PIO?
2. What impact can a PIO have on the fire service?
3. Are fire departments utilizing PIOs?
4. What training is available for PIOs?

5. Can Morris Township Fire Department utilize and institute a PIO position?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Township of Morris is located within the County of Morris, New Jersey. Morris County was created by an act of the New Jersey state legislature in 1738. The Morris county area of New Jersey is referred to as “The Military Capital of the Revolution.” General George Washington and the Continental Army encamped here for the winters of 1778 and 1780 during the Revolutionary War, thus the nickname.

Morris County is one of twenty-one counties in the state of New Jersey. Within Morris County there are 39 municipalities with 45 fire departments, only 4 of these departments operating as combination departments, the balance are volunteer departments. The communities of the area, along with their fire departments, have maintained very independent and self sufficient identities. Recently, this community independence has begun changing, with area fire departments working together through mutual aid agreements and joint services.

The Morris Township Fire Department began as local volunteer fire companies protecting local neighborhoods in the early 1900's. Today the Morris Township Fire Department is a combination type department. The fire department consists administratively of a career chief and a career captain. Other fire department officers include two volunteer battalion chiefs, fifteen (15) volunteer company officers, two career fire inspectors, fourteen (14) career firefighters and approximately sixty (60) active volunteer firefighters. The Morris Township Fire Department operates out of five (5) fire stations and a fire headquarters. Many of the present fire stations are within blocks of their

original locations. The township fire department operates five (5) engines, two (2) ladders, one (1) rescue and one (1) air support unit.

Four years ago, delayed volunteer ambulance responses initiated the fire department's First Responder Program. This program functions on weekdays only and has increased the workload of the firefighters. The initial press coverage was a one page article with picture. At that time Morris Township was, and still is, the only fire department in Morris County to offer this service.

Within the past year the Morris Township Fire Department's First Response Program increased its capabilities with the addition of Automated External Defibrillators (AED's) on all of the fire department's engines. Area police departments have been adding one or two defibrillators and getting "good" press coverage for these smaller purchases. Morris Township Fire Department failed at attempts to publicize its five defibrillators. Something had to be done to change the image of this hard working department.

The author, then deputy chief, sought some educational resources to guide him in better promoting the good work of the Morris Township Fire Department. The author took a class offered by the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety. This three day seminar reviewed the basics of writing a press release, as well as working with TV and radio.

The Morris Township Fire Department purchased a thermal imaging camera, in May in 1998, through the generosity of its Corporations Sponsorship Program. This time, a press release was crafted. A thank-you live demonstration was organized for the corporate sponsors and the press. The response from both groups was favorable. Two state papers put the department on the front page complete with color pictures. This simple act boosted department morale and aided with corporate donations as they also received positive

publicity.

Another aspect of the need for positive press is related to Morristown. For years, Morris Township and Morristown have been seen as one in the same. This muddled identity was complicated when the school districts were forced to merge in 1975. The post office has no Morris Township Office but rather uses Morristown and neighboring Morris Plains and Convent Station for mailing addresses. All this adds to the confusion about the two communities. Morristown is the county seat. This town of four square miles is located entirely within the borders of Morris Township, much like a donut and the donut hole. There are two separate and unique governing bodies and fire departments.

Morristown has a long history of questionable fiscal practices. Due to Morristown's large debt (over 100 Million Dollars) the introduction of drastic budget cuts, and staff reductions have been proposed for the Town of Morristown. Morristown has a combination Fire Department running out of one fire station with six firefighters on a 24 shift schedule. This mostly career fire department is seen as a costly necessity due to the declining volunteer ranks. This decline has been propagated by the fire department's administration and the career division. The adversarial relationship between the career and volunteer firefighters coupled with the budget crisis of Morristown with its threaten layoffs of paid firefighters has lead to bad press in Morristown. This negative press, even though it is not about the Morris Township Fire Department, is reflected on this neighboring combination department.

Morris Township, on the other hand, enjoys low debt, with the second lowest tax rate within Morris County. The Morris Township Fire Department has been involved in the community for over three decades with a building code enforcement, school fire education

and reading programs. The Morris Township Fire Department has been involved with the first responder program for over four years. Morris Township Fire Department enjoys an harmonious relationship between its volunteer and career members. The negative press of Morristown Fire Department has clouded the positive accomplishments of Morris Township Fire Department. The problem in Morris Township is that the public does not know about the diverse services provided by the fire department.

The author, as chief administrator of the Morris Township Fire Department, recognizes two problems. The first problem is how to improve public relations so that the citizens as well as township management will recognize the value of its firefighters. Through this improved public perception, further expansion of fire department programs will be possible.

The second problem is the public's lack of knowledge of the Black Meadows Mutual Aid Association. Another potential application for a PIO is with this association. This organization was originally developed to provided mutual aid support to the fire departments that surround the Morristown Airport. It was formed for aircraft emergencies on or near the airport, which is located on the eastern boundary of Morris Township. The Black Meadows Association membership has expanded from the original five (5) towns that encircle the airport, to eight (8) additional neighboring municipalities, for a total of thirteen (13) members.

The Black Meadows Association has broadened its scope, attempting to contain the rising costs of firefighting by sharing local resources. Some shared services include an air service unit, hazmat team, foam unit, and confined space unit. Making these special services available on a regional basis means less money spent, with a better equipped

and trained response. The fire services are working together to contain costs, unlike police, road departments and other local government agencies. None of this attempt at cost containment for the individual communities, through this association, is getting to the press and back to the citizens of the respective communities. A PIO or PIO team could be developed to assist both the association and the individual department communities.

This research project was designed to explore what is being done to promote the fire service as well as the need to expand publicity programs for fire services in the United States. The project examined the various mechanisms the fire service uses to disseminate information and the applicability for the Morris Township Fire Department and the Black Meadows Association. The relevance of this study to the Morris Township Fire Department lies in its ability to learn more about promoting itself thus gaining public support and eventually, expanding services. With the knowledge the Morris Township Fire Department gains through this research, it can adopt a leadership role within the Black Meadows Association, guiding it to use public information officers. By using PIOs, the Black Meadows Association can promote these expanded shared services and themselves.

This research paper complies with the requirement of the Executive Leadership Course at the National Fire Academy. This project was designed to enhance problem solving skills through the logical analysis of ideas using systematic planning and deductive thinking. Its relevance to the Executive Leadership course at the National Fire Academy is in the project's exploration of Public Information Officers. Applying these concepts to the fire department could enable the organization and its leader to promote itself, gaining public support and eventually expand fire services using sound leadership skills and

theories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature was performed to explore the public information officer, its duties and impacts on the fire service. The literature did not reveal a single definition that was universally agreed upon. "A PIO acts as liaison between the agency and its administration, other government bodies, private organizations, and the media. This liaison function creates goodwill and positive publicity that enhances the agency's image and contributes to public support." states The Law Enforcement Public Information Workshop Manual (p. 2-3).

The PIO is seen as a department spokesperson, wearing many hats. The goal of the PIO is to inform the community about the role of the fire department, writes Szymanski Brown, and Paulsell (p. 50-51). He also says it's the PIO's job to educate the media about fire department procedures in order to facilitate media safety and firefighter's access. According to Tucker (p. 52) the public image of the fire department is only as good as the department sees itself. For the department to be seen as a productive, creative public service you need a voice. That voice, a PIO, should be a firefighter who is comfortable with public speaking and has a working knowledge of the fire department.

A PIO can do many things. According to Stittleburg (p. 25) a PIO can educate the public about how we do our jobs and clarify why certain actions were taken. Media coverage, supplied by the PIO, can boost both career firefighters and volunteer morale, he says. The non-emergent role of the fire department in public education is another hat for the PIO to wear says Keefe (p. 17). PIO's can organize in-house as well as community based

classes in CPR, or baby-sitting classes. As Leonard writes (p. 72) the PIO could organize lectures on fire prevention with such topics as smoke detectors, child safety seats and bicycle helmet use.

Szymanski (p. 50) reminds readers that although fire education and public relations are cousins they are not one in the same. Coleman (p. 54) advocates the using a press release as a tool to get information to the media. He says a press release is more likely to be converted to a news story than a fire report is.

Leonard (p. 73) discussed qualifications for a PIO. One he deemed important was a working knowledge of the department and the local media. Stephenson (p. 19) viewed solid written communication skills important to a PIO. Tucker (p. 52) emphasized the above qualifications and added good public speaking skills. Schaper added (p. 55) a nice appearance, reflecting the standards and quality of the department, as another qualification for a good PIO. Stephenson (p. 18) recommends that the PIO come up through the ranks, demonstrating department commitment to the media and eventually the public. Ruda (personal communication December 8, 1998) advocated a focused, passionate member of the department as the PIO. He said the person needed to be very personable, interact well with the chiefs, and able to be the department's 'horn blower.' The best PIO has the respect of his department members, he concluded.

The PIO can impact the fire service in many ways. Harry Carter (p. 20) advises the best way to get favorable interest in your fire department is by direct contact with the community. Rubin (p. 30) emphasized the need to build better media relations as a means to improve public approval and support. Birr (p. 63) stressed the importance of a good working relationship with the media before a crisis. Continued goodwill could be useful if a

department mishap or controversy surfaces.

Leonard (p. 70-71) described some of the ways a PIO can impact the fire service. Impacts of a PIO include: budget justification, fundraising, recruitment and retention and public education. He discussed the major impact a PIO can have with a key role in an aggressive public relations campaign on both the justification of a budget and a fund-raising effort. The PIO can give potential members important information regarding the mission and purpose of the department. The PIO's public education plan could improve the quality of life for all community members. A safe and healthy public demands less from the fire department thus enabling concentration on true emergencies. Additionally, the educated citizens can enjoy reduced medical costs, insurance and legal fees.

Because the fire service understands itself, does not mean the community understands the fire service, Lavoie (p. 61) points out. If the citizens do not understand the fire service, it is the PIO's job to educate the public about the fire service, justifying its existence. A proactive approach to the media will generate positive coverage of the fire department. This positive coverage will help with volunteer recruitment, raise employee morale and improve the relationship with the community, according to Stephenson (p.18).

The literature is full of articles on departments using a PIO. Schaper (p. 54) recommends every fire department should have a spokesperson, whether large or small. According to Ruda (p. 61) a PIO can provide truthful information in emergencies, keep all facets of the community well informed of department events and activities and be a liaison from the department to the entire community.

Although the author reviewed many articles advocating the use of a PIO, very little was found regarding any preparation or training for PIO's. In the recent Fire Engineering

magazine, Gammon (p. 59) in Indiana recommends training for all staff. He outlined a plan of in-house training from the chief, chief officers to line officers and recruits. Gammon defined his Media Awareness Class to include the responsibilities and duties of the PIO, as well as the types and characteristics of media. He emphasized how the media can put a positive light on the fire department. Gammon described what to say to the press, as well as, how to stay composed saying it. His focus was on training his entire department.

The Phoenix Fire Department, in the same issue, had a different approach. Phoenix Fire Department has a media relations department with a primary function to educate, to update and to inform, this according to Bob Khan (p. 60). The Phoenix FD has established a 40 hour Fire Journalist Academy for the media. This program focuses on training the media about the fire service. As of 1998, Phoenix has had three Fire Journalist Academy graduations.

The Law Enforcement Public Information Workshop Manual (p. 2-115) advocates training all department members. This should include a strategy for communications or communications policy. The training can be reminders, videos, policy distribution and in-service training. They advocated rehearsing for in-depth media preparations.

In summary, the literature described a PIO, its uses and many impacts on the fire service. It advocates the use of a PIO for any size department. Although the literature depicts some fire departments using PIOs, very little is found in print about the training of PIOs. The author feels the literature supports the institution and utilization of the PIO for the Morris Township Fire Department.

PROCEDURES

The collective literature established the working definition of Public Information Officer. Substantial reasons for fire departments to utilize a PIO were found in the literature review. The literature listed many impacts a PIO can have on a department, repeatedly mentioning the impact of the PIO on operational funding.

The author developed a survey instrument, to collect data from fire departments nationally, on their use of PIOs. The draft survey was reviewed by two fire service professionals and two civilian instructors at the National Fire Academy, none of whom were subsequently survey responders. The purpose of the survey was to assess other fire departments in the United States, to determine if they utilize PIOs and whether the PIO was formally trained as such. The population for this survey was the class attending the National Fire Academy, Executive Fire Officers at the time the author attended. The Academy already well mixes and balances attendees of each class in a random fashion. The reader will find the survey tool in Appendix A and the responses in Appendix B.

Additionally, a similar survey, found in Appendix C, was sent to the members of the New Jersey Career Fire Chiefs Association. The NJ Career Fire Chiefs Association is composed of all the career fire chiefs in New Jersey. The group meets monthly across the state discussing information relevant to changes in law, new procedures, etc. The survey was sent to this group to explore the existence of PIO in this state as well as the PIO's training. Additionally, the author hoped to get ideas about how other departments have maintained a relationship with the media. The reader will find the responses in Appendix D.

Limitations

The national survey of the National Fire Academy class utilized a data base that was too small. The question regarding training types did not provide adequate information. Follow-up phone conversations clarified data.

RESULTS

As a result of the literature review, the Public Information Officer can be defined as a person who is well versed in the operations of the fire service and serves as its spokesperson. The literature supports the PIO because of its many impacts on the fire service. A few of the major impacts are: morale boosting, budget justification, retention and recruitment. The author became aware through the review, of many departments utilizing some form of Public Information Officer. The literature also supports the growing appreciation of fiscal control through budgets that all leaders must have to effectively steer their departments toward the next century. This appreciation makes the PIO a useful tool for the justification of budgets as well as informing the public and gaining their support for the fire service.

The literature as well as the surveys suggests that PIOs are being utilized by some departments. The first population surveyed was the class list of the class attending the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officers Program while the author was in attendance. This gave the author a cross-sectional perspective of departments in the United States. Because of the timing of this study, the author was able to get 100% of his surveys returned, total 22. Interestingly, 14 of 22 or 63% of departments are using a PIO. This person could be the Chief, Deputy Chief, Battalion Chief, Captain or other officer.

Specifically designated by title are 11 of 22 or 50%. Of the departments surveyed, 12 of 22 or 54% are utilizing a media guide. Nationally 10 of 22 or 45% of the departments surveyed require some form of training for their PIOs.

The author sent surveys to the membership list of the New Jersey Career Fire Chiefs Association. This is a group of current active fire chiefs across New Jersey. There were 55 surveys sent with 37 responses or 67% returned. Interestingly, 31 of 37 responding departments or 84% felt that media coverage directly impacted fire department operations. Despite this only 4 of 37 or 11% have a designated PIO. However, 12 of 37 or 32% admitted to having a PIO, not necessarily designated by title. In these cases, the job is an additional function of the chief, deputy chief, battalion chief, captain or other officer.

There were only three departments responding (3 of 37 or 8%) that they use a media guide. The media guide was defined as an 'informative handout containing information about your department useful for the media . . .' on the survey tool. Two of the responding departments utilizing a media guide do not have a designated PIO or use someone in that position. Only one town surveyed had a designated PIO and used a media guide.

The NJ Fire Chiefs survey provided some interesting comments in response to survey question number eleven. This question regards the maintenance of department relations with the media. Half of the comments were from departments who deal with the media on a crisis basis only. Comments like being cordial, available or helpful seemed to be prevalent. One fourth of the comments were from departments that communicate actively with the media by providing access to officials and fire reports. The final fourth of the comments was from departments using a proactive approach to the media. These departments feel they have an ongoing relationship with the media. They keep the media

informed of all events, crisis, as well as provide other fire related tips and stories. Some ideas included media information days, media guides and web site outlets for the media.

The author also asked about public information officer training in New Jersey. Only three departments admitted to requiring training. The author attempted to get an idea of what that training encompassed. Follow-up phone contacts revealed this training had been one day seminars. The seminars are haphazardly scheduled and publicized. Some are not given for fire service personnel specifically. None of these seminars are repeated with any predictable frequency or include follow-up training.

Training has not been discussed in the literature until December 1998. Phone contacts and follow-up interviews with authors provided more insight into this issue. One phone conversation was on December 8, 1998, with Captain Steve Ruda, PIO of the Los Angeles City Fire Department. Another phone conversation was with Lieutenant John Gammon, PIO of the Indianapolis Fire Department on December 10, 1998. Both confirmed the meager availability of PIO training. Ruda has developed his own program for in-house training. Ruda is constantly looking for outside sources of training as he explained such as the California Training Institute. Gammon also has developed an in-house training program for the Indianapolis Fire Department. Gammon advocated membership in the National Information Organization Association in Knoxville, Tennessee. Both authors recommended the Fire Department Instructors Conference in Indiana each spring.

In review on the subject of training, most seminars are one day only and not readily or consistently available. At present, there does not seem to be a standard mechanism for training of PIOs across the country. The author has personally learned that training is available from many other sources. If law enforcement has seminars or classes on media

relations or the use of a PIO, the fire department should attend. These concepts are easily applied to the fire service.

The literature and the survey results clearly have indicated the validity of a PIO for Morris Township Fire Department. It is the author's opinion that a public information officer would help this hardworking department get the public support it most certainly has earned. The PIO could aid the author, the department Chief, to justify his budget. Not only could this help with staffing and other expenditures but additionally help with morale and the expansion of services. With the public support of the community, the fire service in Morris Township will be less likely threatened and more likely to grow and continue "safeguarding the high quality of life in our community."

DISCUSSION

The purpose for this research project was to investigate public information officers, their duties and impacts as well as their potential use by the Morris Township Fire Department. The author was pleased to see departments using PIOs both in the literature review and survey results.

A public information officer by definition is someone well-versed in the organization, in this case the fire service, who can act as its spokesperson. Recently, the Morris Township Fire Department has expanded services to include the First Responder Program. The community at large is unaware of these expanded services. The initial reason for this study was to explore the PIO because the author believed the Morris Township Fire Department could benefit from this position.

The review of literature demonstrated the significance of a public information officer for

the fire service. The author had not been aware of the many impacts a PIO can have. Although the author was aware of the impact of budget justification, Leonard (p. 71) expanded this concept to include fundraising aspects. He also wrote about the internal impact a PIO can have on a department not only boosting morale but helping with recruitment and retention. Leonard (p. 72) also exposed the public education value of a PIO. By setting examples and leading, the department can truly safeguard the public.

The literature and surveys both support the use of a PIO. Many authors including, Leonard, Stittleburg, Tucker and Schaper, have made good arguments for PIOs. Tucker (p. 52) wrote that if the fire service was to be seen as a vital, productive, creative hardworking agency, this message needed a way to get to the public. Schaper (p. 54) put it even more simply, saying that the fire department had a story to tell and it should be told. He advocated the use of a PIO for any department, regardless of size, or budget. Stittleburg (p. 25) advocated a PIO to broadcast truthful information, restrict news leaks and promote vital information.

The author was pleased to see 63% of the departments surveyed nationwide were using some form of PIO. Even though the sample was small, the author feels the literature supports this number. It does not appear necessary for most departments to exclusively hire a PIO as this job is best done if it is one of the duties of an existing officer. In the nationwide study, 54% were using a media guide. The author had defined a media guide on the survey as an informative handout containing information useful for the media. A comprehensive media development guide was written by Szymanski (p. 50)

The author recognizes the small number of career or combination departments in NJ. Most fire departments in NJ are all volunteer. The author was dismayed to learn how few

departments in New Jersey are using some form of PIO. Of the New Jersey Career Fire Chiefs responding, 84% felt the media impacted their department operations. Yet despite this overwhelming feeling, only 11% have a designated PIO. However, 32% are using some form of PIO. The author feels this is realistic, as Stephenson (p.18) suggests, the PIO should come from the ranks. This lack of PIO in NJ could be the result of the lack of knowledge or understanding of what a PIO is or how it can impact the fire service.

As previously stated, training for PIOs is available from many sources but the author feels training for PIOs still needs to be addressed. It is the hope of the author that the NJ Career Fire Chiefs will see the validity of public information officers, and undertake some formalized training. This author will continue to look for applicable classes, seminars or manuals to help with training. The author, Steve Ruda (personal communication, December 8, 1998) would be available to teach classes, if needed.

It is the opinion of the author that a public information officer would help any department get the public support it has earned. The town management and the public could be educated by a PIO as to the diversity of services offered by the fire department. The initial reason to research the PIO was to gain public support and expand services. The study has validated the use of a PIO. The author is confident that Morris Township Fire Department can utilize a public information officer to educate and gain public support thus enabling future expansion of services.

The author has recently been promoted to chief of the Morris Township Fire Department. While attending the Executive Fire Officer Program, the author learned a great deal about his role in the management of change. Many changes are expected with this new chief. As the Executive Leadership Course Manual (p. sm10-3) states, "Change

is inevitable, but growth is optional.” The author hopes to effect change within the Morris Township Fire Department, enabling growth of the fire services in order to “safeguard the high quality of life in the community.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this research the author is convinced a Public Information Officer is important for the Morris Township Fire Department. The first phase of recommendations involves the Morris Township Fire Department. The first recommendation would be to share this research project with the administration of the fire department. The second would be to share the concepts with the officers and firefighters, encouraging brainstorming to formulate ideas specific for the Morris Township Fire Department.

The author would recommend the position of a PIO officer be established within the Morris Township Fire Department. This would be an additional duty for an existing position. The PIO should seek any applicable training. Additionally, training should be instituted for the paid division and officers of the Morris Township Fire Department. Included in this training would be, the communication policy, explanations of who and what a PIO does and the intended impact for this position. All efforts of improved departmental communications, internal and external, must be updated to include the PIO. Maximum benefits for the fire department will best be achieved with a unified fire department focus.

The Morris Township Fire Department marketing plan should be revised to include the role of the PIO. The development of a media guide and an incident report sheet are additional recommendations. Both would require in-house training for fire service personnel.

Morris Township Fire Department would also encourage quarterly or monthly prevention and safety tips be written and submitted to local newspapers. These features could be written by any member of the department but be coordinated through the PIO. The community should be made aware of any non-emergent department interaction with the public such as school programs, blood pressure screenings, etc., by the PIO. These articles should be timely in order to be of any use by the fire service.

The second phase would be the sharing of PIO concepts with the Black Meadow Association. This should be done for two reasons. The first would be to expose the group to the concepts of a PIO. The purpose of the PIO would be to inform the participating communities of the group's special teams and efforts at cost containment through better media coverage. The group could share ideas and network names and phone numbers of media members. The second reason would be to advocate the PIO concepts for each member department to benefit from.

The last phase of recommendations refers to the NJ Career Fire Chiefs Association. The survey revealed 92% wanted a copy of the survey results. Personal contacts with members have also indicated interest in this project. It is the author's hope to formally present the findings of this study and advocate the group sponsor training for member departments on the uses and impacts of a public information officer.

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The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance of the Public Information Officer in the fire service. The result of this survey will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Your response to this survey will be anonymous. Please answer the following questions:

Fire Department: _____

Population served: _____ Department size: _____

Department type: Volunteer _____ Career ____ Combination _____

1. Does your fire department have a Public Information Officer (PIO)?

Public Information Officer: Yes ____ No ____

(Please include the PIO's name and Phone # for follow up interview)

2. Who performs in the capacity of PIO?

Chief	_____	Capt.	_____
D/C	_____	FM	_____
B/C	_____	Other	_____

3. Are the individuals in question 3 designated PIO by title?

Yes ____ No ____

4. Does your fire department utilize a media guide?

(A media guide is an informative handout containing information about your department useful to the media/ including but not limited to apparatus and types, phone numbers of key personnel and fire service terms.)

Yes ____ No ____

5. Does your fire department require the PIO to take training?

If yes, what is the training requirement?

Seminars _____ Yes ____ No ____
Classes _____ N/A ____
F D Manual _____

Other _____
(please explain)

The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance of the Public Information Officer in the fire service. The result of this survey will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Your response to this survey will be anonymous. Please answer the following questions:

Fire Department: _____(Total 22 surveys)_____

Population served :_____ Department size: _____

Department type: Volunteer _____ Career __14_ Combination _8__

1. Does your fire department have a Public Information Officer (PIO)?

Public Information Officer: Yes __14_ No __8__

(Please include the PIO's name and Phone # for follow up interview)

2. Who performs in the capacity of PIO?

Chief	_8__	Capt.	_6__
D/C	_1__	FM	_0__
B/C	_4__	Other	_6__

3. Are the individuals in question 3 designated PIO by title?

Yes __11__ No __11__

4. Does your fire department utilize a media guide?

(A media guide is an informative handout containing information about your department useful to the media/ including but not limited to apparatus and types, phone numbers of key personnel and fire service terms.)

Yes __12__ No __10__

5. Does your fire department require the PIO to take training?

If yes, what is the training requirement?

Yes __10__ No __10__

Seminars ____9__

N/A __2__

Classes ____10__

F D Manual ____5__

Other __3__

(please explain)

FIRE DEPARTMENT
35 WOODLAND AVENUE
P.O. BOX 7603
CONVENT STATION, NEW JERSEY 07961-7603
FAX 973-326-1728

CRAIG R. GOSS
FIRE CHIEF

(973)326-7461

November 9, 1998

«Title» «FirstName» «LastName»
«OrganizationName»
«Address»
«City», «State» «PostalCode»

Dear «Title» «LastName»:

As a member of the New Jersey Career Chiefs Association, we are all well aware of the importance an aggressive public relations campaign has had on our colleagues in the police service. The purpose of this survey is to explore the extent in which New Jersey fire departments are involved in the dissemination of public information.

Please take a moment to complete the survey. It will be submitted as part of an applied research project for the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy.

The results of this survey will be made available to the NJCFCA membership. Thank you for assisting in this project. You may fax this survey back to me at 973-326-1728

Very truly yours,

Craig R. Goss
Fire Chief

The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance of the Public Information Officer in the fire service. The result of this survey will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Your response to this survey will be anonymous. Please answer the following questions: (You may use the back for further explanations if needed.)

Fire Department:

Population served: _____ Department size: _____

Department type: Career ____ Combination ____ Volunteer ____

1. Do you feel that the media coverage your department receives has an impact on the fire department operations (i.e. budget, manning, equipment, programs).
Yes ____ No ____

2. Do you feel your department receives proper coverage in the media for fire department events? Are some of your events upstaged frequently by other organizations?

	<u>Proper coverage</u>		<u>upstaged by others</u>	
Fires:	Yes ____	No ____	Yes ____	No ____
Public Education	Yes ____	No ____	Yes ____	No ____
General Information	Yes ____	No ____	Yes ____	No ____
Medical programs	Yes ____	No ____	Yes ____	No ____

3. How are media releases handled within your community?

Must be cleared by the town first? Yes ____ No ____
 By the Department Head? Yes ____ No ____
 Handled by the PIO (town)? Yes ____ No ____
 Handled by the PIO (Fire)? Yes ____ No ____

4. Does your department currently have a Public Information Officer (PIO)?
Yes ____ No ____

5. Who acts in the capacity of PIO for the department?

Chief	____	Capt.	____
Dep. Chief	____	Fire Marshall	____
Batt. Chief	____	Other	____

Is this individual designated PIO by title? Yes ____ No ____

6. Does your department require the PIO to take training? Yes ____ No ____
7. What are the training requirements?
Seminars ____
Formal Classes ____
Fire Department Training Manual ____
Other ____
8. Has your department ever made an attempt to meet the media, outside of an emergency situation? Standard introductions? Yes ____ No ____
9. Does your department keep a current file on the media, the names and phone numbers? Yes ____ No ____
10. Does your fire department utilize a media guide? Yes ____ No ____
- (A media guide is an informative handout containing information about your department useful to the media; including but not limited to apparatus and types, phone numbers of key personnel and fire service terms.)
11. What does your department do to maintain its good relationship with the media?

Would you like a copy of the results of this survey? Yes ____ No ____

Thank you for your assistance in completing this survey.

The purpose of this survey is to assess the importance of the Public Information Officer in the fire service. The result of this survey will be included in an applied research project for the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. Your response to this survey will be anonymous. Please answer the following questions: (You may use the back for further explanations if needed.)

Fire Department: **NJ Career Fire Chief Assoc. (55 surveys)**

Population served: _____ Department size: _____

Department type: Career **22** Combination **14** Volunteer **1**

1. Do you feel that the media coverage your department receives has an impact on the fire department operations (i.e. budget, manning, equipment, programs).
Yes **31** No **6**

2. Do you feel your department receives proper coverage in the media for fire department events? Are some of your events upstaged frequently by other organizations?

	<u>Proper coverage</u>		<u>upstaged by others</u>	
Fires:	Yes 27	No 8	Yes 7	No 20
Public Education	Yes 22	No 12	Yes 9	No 18
General Information	Yes 16	No 18	Yes 15	No 14
Medical programs	Yes 11	No 12	Yes 10	No 8
	*N/A 6		*N/A 5	

*were responses on surveys

3. How are media releases handled within your community?
- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Must be cleared by the town first? | Yes 5 | No 15 |
| By the Department Head? | Yes 33 | No 1 |
| Handled by the PIO (town)? | Yes 6 | No 16 |
| Handled by the PIO (Fire)? | Yes 5 | No 10 |

4. Does your department currently have a Public Information Officer (PIO)?
Yes **12** No **25**

5. Who acts in the capacity of PIO for the department?
- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| Chief | 21 | Capt. | 3 |
| Dep. Chief | 14 | Fire Marshall | 5 |
| Batt. Chief | 5 | Other | 10 |

- Is this individual designated PIO by title? Yes 4 No 28
6. Does your department require the PIO to take training? Yes 4 No 29
*N/A 3

*were responses on surveys

7. What are the training requirements?
- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Seminars | <u>4</u> |
| Formal Classes | <u>1</u> |
| Fire Department Training Manual | <u>1</u> |
| Other | <u>2</u> |
| N/A | <u>6</u> |
8. Has your department ever made an attempt to meet the media, outside of an emergency situation? Standard introductions? Yes 34 No 1
9. Does your department keep a current file on the media, the names and phone numbers? Yes 28 No 9
10. Does your fire department utilize a media guide? Yes 4 No 33
- (A media guide is an informative handout containing information about your department useful to the media; including but not limited to apparatus and types, phone numbers of key personnel and fire service terms.)
11. What does your department do to maintain its good relationship with the media?
Comments enclosed on the following page

Would you like a copy of the results of this survey? Yes 32 No 5

Thank you for your assistance in completing this survey.

Comments that were attached to the surveys.

Question 2.

- *some exceptions
- Some what

Question 3.

- ** Depending on the subject material.
- The city does have a PIO. The only times we have to go through him are for major incidents. For most fire incidents the Chief of department or the tour commander (Dep. Chief) will give the release. For any releases involving administrative areas, sensitive areas, or major releases, only the chief of department will respond.
- Depends on nature/type of event.

Question 4.

- Card attached.
- Not-officially.
- Not specific, Most instances I utilize our Battalion Chief/Fire Marshal (career). However, when that Officer is not available we select a competent and trained individual.

Question 5.

- Other - Director of Public Safety.
- Firefighter.
- Duty Officer.

Question 6.

- OEM Coordinator is D/C in FD & has PIO Training

Question 7.

- Voluntary.
- County Fire Academy Class.

Question 8.

- We meet with local town paper reporters. However, these reporters leave the job within months. We start over again.
- Lunch & Breakfast with reporters planning a media day.
- Standard introductions.
- Both - Intro. new services & programs.

Question 10.

- We do list on city web page.

Question 11.

- We fax all press releases to Star-Ledger, W.O. Chronicle and TV12. We follow-up with a call. Media often take the police slant on stories, even fires. Our police have enough people to dedicate to PIO.
- Cordial meeting with new media reps. planning a media day event.
- Maintain a personal relationship with the reporters. Issue press passes to allow them access to fire scenes and other emergency operations.
- yes
- Occasional meetings. Write up a weekly press release of departmental activities.
- We try to accommodate their requests for information on a timely basis.
- Assist them in reporting when necessary.
- Close contact. Provide any requested information when possible.
- We maintain contact and have a good rapport, however, I feel we do not receive adequate coverage from them.
- Welcome their inquiries.
- Submit monthly articles invite them to different events.
- We are available and courteous at all times.
- Timely and cooperative response to media's request for information. Formal introduction of new beat reporters to the chief of department by the news paper staff. Invite media to department events.
- PIO reaches out to local media after incidents and before planned events.
- Local newspaper is always looking for information. We constantly provide this only to keep them happy. They do not always print the information.
- We cooperate as much as possible with media inquiries & with sharing information.
- Maintains good P/R by providing well-written press releases and always providing access to officials for current stories.
- Weekly fire blotter (report of activities), Periodic fire safety articles, Radio PSA's, Invitations to special fire department events.
- Keep open lines of communications at all times not just during emergency situations.
- Weekly news release in all three local papers.
- We try to submit timely information to our local paper.
- Personal contact.
- Works hard at it everyday. Constant battle for the opportunity to be heard.
- Notify media of upcoming events.
- Because of our fire activity we often communicate with the reporters from the different newspapers. We have a fairly good relationship. We do reach out to the Media for special programs. We recently started a First Responder program. we tried to get good coverage on this. But it appeared that it was not very newsworthy. We received a very small article. It appears it has to involve death & destruction before the fire departments become newsworthy.
- Be available / be honest.
- Ask about their expectations.
- Inform the media of our expectations.

- Question 11 comments continued -

- We give weekly reports to media and make information readily available.
- Press releases for fires and / or rescues as well as citizen recognition.
- Consistently notify the members of the media when the Department has a special event, a new accomplishment, or any other such activity.
- First of all we have always taken a pro active approach to consistent interaction with the press & media. having a firm belief that it has served to improve the Department's image throughout the community. As you will see by some of the information contained within this packet, we have made a concerted effort to notify the press/media during any and all events that we believe would be of interest to the community.

During fire and emergencies, if we are not approached during the incident, we make sure that any late requests for information and phone calls are followed up on.

Additionally, if we are not contacted at all, yet we have handled an incident of significance, the I/C or designated company officer will complete and fax out the (Press Release Form).

Another conveyance that we have utilized is the mailing of a community newsletter to each and every residence and business owner twice a year. The feed back regarding this program has been extremely positive, and again we believe that it has served to enhance the public's opinion of this organization.

Complete access to emergency scenes.

Responding to their requests for interviews or issue of controversy.

We stay in constant contact with them about future events and public education programs in schools.

Make information available to them where and when appropriate.